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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 27 January 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to draw your attention to several acts of Palestinian terrorism to target Israeli civilians in recent days.

On Thursday, 23 January, at approximately 8.15 p.m. (local time), Palestinian terrorists ambushed an Israel Defense Forces patrol on the road between Beit Hagai and Kiryat Arba. Three Israeli soldiers — Cpl. Ronald Berrer, age 20, Cpl. Assaf Bitan, age 19 and Sr.-Sgt. Ya'akov Naim, age 20 — were killed in the attack. The terrorist organization Hamas claimed responsibility.

Meanwhile, Palestinian terrorists have increased their indiscriminate missile attacks on Israeli towns and villages in southern Israel. On Tuesday, 21 January, Palestinian terrorists launched a rocket that landed and exploded in the living room of a private residence, while children slept in the next room. Only by chance, none of the residents of the home were injured. Then on Thursday, 23 January, the southern Israeli town of Sderot came under fire from Kassam rockets. Schoolchildren in the town were herded into underground shelters. One of the rockets landed in the yard of a private home, injuring a woman hanging laundry. Two other rockets landed in a field. The terrorist organization Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement carried on Hizbullah's Al-Manar satellite television network based in Beirut.

Also last week, Israeli Border Police averted a major terrorist attack when they intercepted a suspicious vehicle trying to infiltrate Israel near Umm al Fahm. The car was carrying 500 kilograms of explosives and three gas canisters connected to a detonator. The four occupants of the vehicle escaped to Palestinian Authority-controlled territory.

Recent events, in particular the increasing and criminal use of rocket attacks on civilian towns, confirm the ongoing failure of the Palestinian leadership to take even minimal steps to calm tensions and to bring an end to terrorism and incitement, as explicitly called for by the Security Council. Efforts by Palestinian terrorist groups to target Israeli civilians go on unimpeded, while the relentless incitement in

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the official Palestinian media and educational institutions continues to swell the ranks of willing volunteers for terrorist attacks, including suicide missions. A poem written by a 12-year-old published on the children's page of the official Palestinian Authority daily *Al-Ayyam* expressed the author's longing to die: "I have responded to my country's call, My honor shall not fall, My *Shahada* [martyrdom] is in my hands, I shall redeem my country with my soul."

Palestinian incitement and glorification of terrorism and suicide bombing has even extended into the realm of children's sporting activities with the recent sponsorship by the Palestinian Authority of a children's football tournament in which teams were named in tribute to suicide bombers. Among those celebrated was Abdel-Basset Odeh, the terrorist responsible for the Passover massacre on 17 March 2002, in which 29 Israelis were killed and more than 60 were wounded.

Complementing the Palestinian Authority's active encouragement of youngsters to respect and emulate the actions of terrorists is its ongoing refusal to bring an end to the activities of known terrorist organizations that operate freely in Palestinian territory. The Palestinian Authority's failure even to attempt to restrain terrorist groups like Hamas was confirmed recently by the group's spiritual leader, Ahmed Yassin, who, speaking from his home in Gaza where he is given safe haven by the Palestinian Authority, asserted that the Palestinian leadership had given its tacit approval to Hamas by not doing anything to stop attacks. Said Yassin: "They turn a blind eye or turn their back."

In such an atmosphere, where children are taught to revere and emulate mass murderers and where known terrorist organizations that reject any return to dialogue and negotiations are operating freely with the approval of the Palestinian leadership, Israel has no choice but to take measures to protect its citizens from the unrelenting threat of terrorist activity. So long as the Palestinian leadership refuses to take even the most basic steps to fulfil its obligations, Israel's countermeasures will remain an indispensable component of its exercise of its right to self-defence. The Palestinian leadership must be held accountable for these daily crimes which violate the most basic principles of international law and endanger both Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

While the murder of innocents is viewed by the Palestinian leadership as a legitimate political tool, and its perpetrators are glorified as heroes and martyrs worthy of emulation, any progress on a negotiated political settlement will be impossible. Israel therefore calls once again on the Palestinian leadership to respect its obligations to end all acts of violence, terrorism and incitement as called for by the Security Council and international law, to prevent its territory from serving as a base for terrorist attacks, and to take active steps to restore an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of negotiations for the benefit of both peoples.

I submit this letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism that began in September 2000.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 160 and 36, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dan **Gillerman**
Permanent Representative